

Evaluating Electronic Health Record Vendors

Selecting an electronic health record (EHR) vendor can appear to be a large undertaking. A number of resources exist that can help your practice evaluate and select an EHR vendor that will meet, and hopefully exceed, the needs of your practice. These tools available will assist your practice in developing the criteria, evaluating the response, and ranking the responses. It is important to use the same evaluation criteria when evaluating the systems to ensure consistency in the information that you are assessing in the selection process.

The *American Academy of Family Physicians* (AAFP) has developed an assessment tool that enables physicians to rank EHR characteristics regarding functionality, cost, vendor services and support for each vendor using a scale of one through five, with five being the best. Practices can consider which of these characteristics are important in a side by side comparison of each vendor, and provide a quantifiable final value that ranks which vendor best addresses the needs of the practice. This scoresheet is located at: http://www.aafp.org/online/etc/medialib/aafp_org/documents/news_pubs/fpm/pcmhtools/ehrvendorrating.Par.0001.File.tmp/ehrvendorrating.pdf.

The *American College of Physicians* (ACP) has developed a slightly different tool in evaluating EHRs. The ACP uses a checklist that lists a number of the features for each of the EHR products. The checklist requires that practices identify which vendors offer a specific feature such as laboratory or x-ray histories. The checklist allows practices to identify EHR's features that are essential to the practice, and provides a final score to compare EHRs. The ACP tool is located at: http://www.acponline.org/acp_press/electronic_health_records/checklist.pdf.

The *Doctor's Office Quality – Information technology* (DOQ-IT) has an evaluation tool that is similar to the AAFP and ACP tools. DOQ-IT uses a table that identifies features such as medications or laboratory results, and asks a series of questions on the use and importance of this feature. This table allows the practice to prioritize the functionalities that are most important to the practice, and uses a scale of one to five, with five being the best, to assess the function's value to the practice. This tool is located at: <http://www.healthinsight.org/hcp/doqit/assets/doc/Vendor%20Evaluation%20Matrix%204.26.06.doc>.

In addition to evaluating and ranking the responses from each of the vendor's RFP response, it is important for practices to request vendor demonstrations, check references, and conduct site visits that will provide important information in helping to select the best EHR product for the practice. The AAFP offers an example on the types of questions that one can ask in verifying the references of a vendor. The reference questions focus on the type of practice currently utilizing the vendor's EHR, who in the practice uses the software, the level of training and support offered by the vendor, the success in implementing the software and hardware, and user satisfaction with the product. These reference questions are available at: <http://www.aafp.org/fpm/2005/0200/p55.html#fpm20050200p55-bt4>.

Another tool offered by the AAFP is the EHR Demonstration Rating Form. This form requests each person participating in the demonstrations to evaluate the ease of use observed based on a list of the various functions for the EHR product. The EHR Demonstration Rating Form is located at: http://www.aafp.org/online/etc/medialib/aafp_org/documents/news_pubs/fpm/pcmhtools/ehrdemorateform.Par.0001.File.tmp/ehrdemorateform.pdf.